

Senior cadets learn the ropes

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Police departments sometimes have a difficult time reaching out to the senior population. So when Duxbury Police Lieutenant Susan James was recently mobbed by people at the Senior Center asking her questions, she credited the Senior Police Academy for fostering better relations between police and seniors.

The senior academy has been around since 2004 and

is combined with the department's DECIDE program, which stands for developing elder choice and defensive education.

"We teach safety, and we also let them know what it's like to be part of a police academy," James said. The senior group was an extension of the existing student police academy, she said.

The program begins Thursday, Sept. 24, and will run for

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Seniors go to police school

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eight Thursdays from 9:30 a.m. to 12 noon at the Senior Center. Seniors of all ages are welcome to participate.

When the seniors first arrive, James and her fellow teacher, Sgt. Kristin Golden, have the "new recruits" fill out background checks and paperwork just like any other police academy rookie.

From there, seniors go on ride-a-longs, to see what daily life is like as a Duxbury police officer. They also go to court to sit in on cases, travel to the Plymouth County Jail, and get a gun safety lesson at the Marshfield Rod and Gun Club. Last year, the group got a tour of Duxbury Bay from Harbormaster Don Beers and visited the helicopter facilities of MedFlight and the State Police air wing.

Although the classes are

sometimes limited by the number of people who can fit in the Senior Center's "Sadie" bus, the program has been so popular the police often find themselves giving seniors rides in cruisers.

"Kristen and I have a hard time saying no," said James. "We have a lot of people who have taken the class over and over again."

James feels the academy helps break down the barriers between the senior population and police.

"They realize we're people just like they are, it closes that gap between the public and the police department. I just thoroughly enjoy my time with them," she said.

Although many of the classes and field trips in the academy are fun, there is also an important safety aspect. Senior are often the most vul-

nerable population in town to certain types of crime.

"I think scams are a big issue right now, between the internet and telephone calls," said James. She said seniors who have participated in the academy are often more likely to call police with a question or concern.

The academy ends with a graduation ceremony. Participants are allowed to invite members of their family to a dinner at the senior center. Town officials and other dignitaries are often in attendance.

"It just makes a nice ending to the 8-10 weeks," said James. "We encourage them to keep in contact, they can come and visit us anytime."

There are still a few spots left for the Senior Police Academy. Contact Linda Hayes at 781-934-5774 to reserve your seat in the class.